

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9893

INFO AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

S E C R E T BUENOS AIRES 1016

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, AR

SUBJECT: AFTERMATH OF CHAPADMALAL RUMORS

REF: A. BA 811, B. BA 718, C. BA 576

1. SUMMARY. APPARENTLY THERE WAS A QUARREL BETWEEN LOPEZ REGA AND LASTIRI WHICH LED TO MRS PERON'S HURRIED MOVE TO THE NAVAL BASE AT PUNTA MOGOTES. THIS HAD NO PARTICULAR POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE AND IN NO WAY SUGGESTED RUPTURE BETWEEN MRS PERON AND LOPEZ REGA. THERE WAS, HOWEVER, SOME DEMARCHE ON PART OF MILITARY WHICH LATER CONSIDERED INIMICAL TO HIM. RESULTS OF SPATE OF RUMORS REPORTED IN REFTEL ARE THAT PRESS IS MORE FREELY DISCUSSING ISSUE OF LOPEZ REGA'S PLACE IN GOVT AND HE IS ADOPTING SOMEWHAT LOWER PROFILE. WHETHER OR NOT THIS IMPLIES ANY REALLY SUSTANTIVE AND LASTING CHANGE IN HIS POSITION, HOWEVER, REMAINS VERY MUCH TO BE SEEN. END SUMMARY

2. BASED ON INFORMATION PROVIDED BY EMBASSY'S BEST CONTACTS IN UCR, PERONIST PARTY AND WELL-CONNECTED POLITICAL COLUMNISTS, FOLLOWING APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN THE KERNELS OF FACT BENEATH THE SMOKE OF MYRIAD RUMORS TWO WEEKS AGO.

3. FIRST, MRS PERON'S MOVE FROM CHAPADMALAL TO THE NAVAL BASE HAD BEEN CONSIDERED FOR SOME TIME. SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS

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WERE DOUBTLESS A FACTOR IN THESE PROJECTIONS. MRS PERON'S MOVE,

WHEN IT CAME, HOWEVER, WAS HURRIED AND UNSCHEDULED. IT APPARENTLY CAME AS THE RESULT OF A TOWERING ARGUMENT OVER THE DINNER TABLE AT CHAPADMALAL BETWEEN LOPEZ REGA AND LASTIRI. MRS PERON WAS SO UPSET BY THE VEHEMENCE OF THE QUARREL THAT SHE FLED THE ROOM AND SOON THEREAFTER MOVED TO PUNTA MOGOTES NAVAL BASE. FOR HIS PART, LOPEZ REGA, WISHING TO LET THE DUST SETTLE, CHOSE THAT MOMENT TO MAKE A TRIP TO PORTO ALEGRE, BRAZIL. (THE EMBASSY HAS HARD EVIDENCE THAT LOPEZ REGA WAS IN BRASIL FOR THREE DAYS. IT IS NOT CERTAIN, HOWEVER, WHETHER THE PURPOSE OF THE TRIP WAS BUSINESS OR RELIGION--I.E. TO PARTICIPATE IN MACUMBA RITES--OR BOTH.)

4. THE QUARREL, MRS PERON'S MOVE AND LOPEZ REGA'S TRIP TO BRAZIL PROBABLY HAD LITTLE REAL POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE--THOUGH THEY CERTAINLY CONTRIBUTED TO THE WILD RUMORS CIRCULATING AT THAT TIME. THE QUARREL WAS "WITHIN THE FAMILY" AND IMPLIED NO BREAK BETWEEN MRS PERON AND LOPEZ REGA. LOPEZ REGA AND LASTIRI ARE KNOWN TO HAVE SHARPLY DISAGREED ON PRIOR OCCASIONS WITH NO LASTING IMPACT ON THE RELATIONSHIP.

5. OF GREATER SIGNIFICANCE WAS A SECOND DEVELOPMENT WHICH TOOK PLACE ABOUT THE SAME TIME: A MILITARY DEMARCHE TO THE PRESIDENT WHICH WAS IN SOME WAY INIMICAL TO LOPEZ REGA'S POSITION. AS INDICATED IN BA 576, THE EMBASSY DOES NOT BELIEVE THE MILITARY DID PRESENT, OR THAT THEY WOULD HAVE AT THIS TIME PRESENTED, ANYTHING RESEMBLING AN ULTIMATUM. THEIR APPROACH PROBABLY TOOK THE FORM OF A LIST OF COMPLAINTS OR SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGES. IN THE LIGHT OF THE FEB 9 COMMUNIQUE ANNOUNCING THE ARMY'S ENTRY INTO THE STRUGGLE AGAINST TERRORISM(SEE SEPTTEL), MANY HAVE CONCLUDED THAT THE MOVE TOWARD GREATER MILITARY PARTICIPATION IN AND CONTROL OVER THE ANTITERRORIST CAMPAIGN WAS ONE ITEM WHICH CONCERNED LOPEZ REGA--IMPLYING, AS IT DID, SOME DIMINUTION OF HIS OWN CONTROL AND SOME LOSS OF FACE FOR LUIS MARGARIDE, THE LOPEZ REGA-APPOINTED FEDERAL POLICE CHIEF. WHATEVER THE NATURE OF THE MILITARY DEMARCHE, IT IS CLEAR THAT SOME MOVE WAS MADE WHICH LOPEZ REGA CONSIDERED PREJUDICIAL TO HIM. WERE IT NOT SO, HIS UNSOLICITED STATEMENTS OF JAN 30 INSISTING THAT HIS RELATIONS WITH MILITARY ARE EXCELLENT WOULD MAKE LITTLE SENSE.

6. FURTHER, THAT THE CRITICAL REFERENCES TO HIM (SEE BA 718)

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HAVE STUNG LOPEZ REGA AND CAUSED HIM TO ADOPT SOMETHING OF A DEFENSIVE POSTURE IS CLEARLY INDICATED IN AN EDITORIAL SIGNED BY HIM IN THE FEB 8 EDITION OF REALITIES 74, A TABLOID NEWSPAPER PUT OUT BY THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL WELFARE. IN IT, HE DESCRIBES HIMSELF AS THE CHIEF TARGET OF A DEFAMATORY RUMOR CAMPAIGN, AND RATHER PETULANTLY COMPLAINS THAT MANY OF THOSE WHO CRITICIZE HIM DON'T REALIZE THEY HAVE RECEIVED "BROTHERLY ASSISTANCE" FROM THE GOVT (READ, THE SOCIAL WELFARE MINISTRY). ALSO INTERESTING

IN THIS RESPECT IS AN ARTICLE ENTITLED "LOPEZ REGA AND THE RUMORS"
APPEARING IN THE LATEST ISSUE OF LAS BASES. LOPEZ REGA IS
DESCRIBED AS THE "EPICENTER" OF A "FURIOUS AND IMPORTANT
ATTACK WHICH BROKE AGAINST THE WALL OF LABOR, LOVE AND CONFIDENCE
WHICH THE PEOPLE HAVE PLACED IN THEIR GOVERNMENT".

7. WHETHER OR NOT LOPEZ REGA'S HAND HAS IN FACT BEEN WEAKENED,
ONE OBVIOUS CHANGE IN THE CLIMATE HERE HAS BEEN SEEN IN THE
FACT THAT SINCE THE EVENTS OF CHPADMALAL THE END OF JANUARY,
THE PRESS HAS BEEN SOMEWHAT LESS RETICENT IN PUBLICLY DISCUSSING
THE CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING LOPEZ REGA. ONE COULD INTERPRET--
AND SOME ARE INTERPRETING--THIS AS AN INDICATION THAT THE PRESS
SENSES LOPEZ REGA TO BE SLIPPING. THERE IS INDEED SOME EVIDENCE
THAT LOPEZ REGA IS ASSUMING A RELATIVELY LOWER PROFILE. AND THE
ARMY'S ENTRY INTO THE ANTI-TERRORIST CAMPAIGN, ON BALANCE, DOES
REPRESENT SOMETHING OF A NET LOSS FOR HIM. BUT THE ONE COULD BE
FOR PUBLIC CONSUMPTION AND THE OTHER A TEMPORARY MEASURE.
THERE IS AS YET AT LEAST NO EVIDENCE THAT HIS POWER HAS IN FACT
BEEN INSIGNIFICANTLY CIRCUMSCRIBED.

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